

## Virginia “Ginny” Brown-Waite

1943–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

REPUBLICAN FROM FLORIDA

2003–



Image courtesy of the Member

WITH NEARLY 30 YEARS' POLITICAL EXPERIENCE in two states, Ginny Brown-Waite approached her freshman term in the 108th Congress (2003–2005) with the goal of looking out for the interests of her Gulf Coast constituency that includes large numbers of retirees and veterans. Formerly the president *pro tempore* of the Florida senate, and a seasoned political aide in New York state, Brown-Waite pursued her legislative interests from her three influential committee assignments: Budget, Financial Services, and Veterans' Affairs.

Virginia Brown was born in Albany, New York, on October 5, 1943. She graduated from Albany's Vincentian High School in 1961 and was married that same year. In the next five years she had two daughters, Danene and Lorie (she would later adopt a third daughter, Jeannine). In the early 1970s, Brown took a job with New York state senator Walter Langley. She began a 17-year career in the state legislature, where she also worked for Long Island senator Owen Johnson. While working full time, Brown earned a bachelor of science in public administration from the University of New York at Albany in 1976 and was the first member of her family to earn a college degree.<sup>1</sup> She later earned her labor studies certificate from Cornell University.<sup>2</sup> Brown continued her education at Russell Sage College, in Troy, New York, where she earned her M.S. in public administration in 1984. After divorcing her first husband, Brown married Harvey Waite, a New York state trooper.

Brown-Waite's career in electoral politics began after the family relocated to Brooksville, Florida, along the Gulf Coast north of Tampa, following Harvey Waite's retirement. After finishing her duties in Albany, Brown-Waite began to care for her elderly mother. Her mother died a year later, and Brown-Waite became involved in local Florida politics, serving on the Hernando County board

of commissioners from 1991 to 1993. In 1992, Brown-Waite won election to the Florida state senate by defeating a 24-year veteran state legislator. She served for three terms, chairing several committees: natural resources and conservation, health care, and criminal justice. She also was vice chair on the rules and calendar and fiscal policy committees. Brown-Waite became known for her work on welfare and health care reform and veterans' issues.<sup>3</sup> She climbed the GOP ranks and was named the majority whip in 1999 and served as president *pro tempore* of the Florida senate from 2001 until 2002. Meanwhile, she also worked as an adjunct professor at Springfield College's Tampa campus.

In 2002, redistricting favored Brown-Waite in the race for Florida's west central congressional seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Formerly a solidly Democratic district, it had been redrawn and was evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans. Brown-Waite won the GOP primary in September 2002 and focused her energies in what she dubbed a "sleep-optional" campaign against the five-term incumbent, Democrat Karen Thurman. She depended on grass-roots volunteers for most of her campaigning, stating, "We knew it was going to be won on the ground, not the airwaves."<sup>4</sup> In a district populated by many retirees, Brown-Waite's platform focused on revamping Social Security, improving prescription drug benefits to seniors, and tax cuts as a catalyst for economic growth.<sup>5</sup> Brown-Waite prevailed over Thurman in a hard-fought campaign.<sup>6</sup>

Taking her seat as part of the Republican majority in the 108th Congress, Brown-Waite was appointed to the Financial Services Committee, serving on the Subcommittees on Capital Markets, Insurance and GSE's, Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit, and Oversight and Investigations. As she represented a large number of veterans in Florida's 5th District, she also gained an appointment to the Veterans' Affairs Committee, serving on the Subcommittees on Benefits and on Health. Brown-Waite also acted as the vice chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues. She remained loyal to her party and supported President George W. Bush, voting in favor of criminalizing partial-birth abortion, issuing private school vouchers in the District of Columbia, and supporting the President's tax cuts. She also cosponsored legislation which overhauled Medicare and created a prescription drug benefit. In 2004, Brown-Waite was elected to a second term, defeating Democrat Robert Whittel 66 to 34 percent.<sup>7</sup>

## FOR FURTHER READING

*Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*, "Virginia Brown-Waite"  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov>

## NOTES

1 Ginny Brown-Waite, "SGS '84: Newest Sage Graduate in College," *Sage Crossroads*, Winter 2003: 3. Available at [www.sage.edu/TSC/news/pdfs/crossroads\\_winter2003.pdf](http://www.sage.edu/TSC/news/pdfs/crossroads_winter2003.pdf) (accessed 11 March 2004).

2 "Ginny Brown-Waite for U.S. Congress," available at [www.brown-waiteforcongress.com/bio.htm](http://www.brown-waiteforcongress.com/bio.htm) (accessed 6 November 2002).

3 "Ginny Brown-Waite for U.S. Congress."

4 "How Brown-Waite Ousted Thurman," 7 November 2002, *St. Petersburg Times*: 1.

5 "Ginny Brown-Waite," 1 September 2002, *Lakeland Ledger*: S6; "Virginia 'Ginny' Brown-Waite," 8 September 2002, *Orlando Sentinel*: G6.

6 *Politics in America*, 2004: 228.

7 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.